**T J DEMA**

**Tuareg Indigo**

I am she who wears colour on skin

Adorning flesh with desert shades of indigo

My stories tell themselves below eyes

Above buttered cheeks

I have no need for a metal sky

A casket carved of bone, mortared in blood

I am a million constellations moulded of mud

The colour of a waking sky

Purple blue memories, sand storm covered secrets

Between my lover the desert

And I

**Since Circumcision**

It had been years since it had been done

Since a crowd had gathered waving goodbye

with smiles on their faces

Not quite cold, as one morning

When one flag came down

and another rose glistening

Azure and multi racial racing up the pole

Not since then had there been such joy

In their thousands they waded into the unknown

They went to a place where for the barber

The trouser must come off

And between rock and shrub

Each boy must sever the leather bag he is

Of games and childhood name calling

To become a strapping, foreshortened adaptation

Of his former self

Puberty is for the body

The mind hungers after ceremony

And my people know how to

Seduce it into wrapping itself in tattered cloth

To walk barefoot back into this world

We know no other way that works

But to teach pain to the weapon

Before applying green relief to that appendage

Hoping that knowing compassion

Will soothe all of tomorrow’s inflamed and painful bits

Back to this moment

When the huntsman stood still before a falling blade

## Other woman: the what-now blues

I lie deathly still in moist embrace

Mind heavy with sleep

Yet I know before he leaves

There are words I must speak

Breath even and deep

### His scent filling me

### With remembered need, I plunge

And gently announce

My womb is heavy with borrowed seed

**Writing**

The feeling exhumes itself first

You cannot call it

It must ask for you by name

And when the first wave hits

Your chest stale with old air

Unbuckle yourself, float

Do not hold on or back

Do not attempt to sand your beaches with sack

You are hessian

A hungry hour glass for the dune wind

The real work begins and ends with release

**Mutineer minuet**

I have been spotted

Spreading one leg towards the light

Dainty foot booted

Tyres burning rubber flesh to ash in the night

They come for me

While I am naked as desert sand

Wet behind ear / I am rain

Between thighs / I am forest growing everything anew

I am sand slipping away the fullness of youth

I have grown gills in the name of a storm coming

**After Adam**

Men are such contrary things

They clutch at their gods

As though they would climb

Down to them

Slip between templed fingers

And land at mortal feet

Yet we and they

Walk a different path

And since you are the one not winged

Adam’s son

Stand naked beneath the brooding sky

Be the simple thing you are meant to be

**Ovaria**

**i**

When midnight comes

I find I have been away too long

Blowing my insides upside down

An umbrella in the wind

Too busy believing

In dreams

In the magic to be found

In rat-infested pumpkin patches

And men with time

And one too many glass slippers in their hands

**ii**

Women learn

That sometimes there is blood

But not death

They learn to conceal the womb with breast

To choose that which can be lost

The hopeful recipe or the constant cake in cupboard

They learn to clutch the knife

Blade to borrowed rib

To empty the cup and be content

With utterly nothing

**Slaughter**

There is a bellow the cow makes at the moment of slaughter

A kind killer knows how to suddenly stab and slash

The bleating goat’s throat to silence

To still the beat of a heart that surely must know

What is coming? If only once it is too late

He could slaughter and skin a goat

Taller than I could stand then

I would watch, corn-rowed hair

Squeezing conspicuously against an open wall

As he would flatten wild sage with a stomp and double thud

The reeds would lie obedient

Their sweet stench seeping unnoticed into the air

I remember the first time I saw life

Congealed at the heel of a boot, dribbling off a jack-knife

Wet on the Pointer’s short-wire fur and tongue

I am no longer that easily removed

Though the sound my green city tongue made then

Undid all his efforts at kindness

Dragging the ritual performed unwilling

Back from the sage-smoked other side

To bear witness before my youthful verdict

**Domboshava**

Imagine you come from this

And then you wake

Up in a shack

On a sugar plantation

You are hungry

For the freedom of open air

Yet unable to name the thing

Not there anymore

Dennis says, of a different prison

*It is not all terror*

*And deprivation*

Between their redemption and your salvation

You will walk to a drum song, its skin fraught with wickedness

But this rock above you now folds and folds and

Folds holding the ancient, the future and the you

Standing here now on the edge of it all

1 Domboshava which translates to red hill in Shona is a site in Zimbabwe with 6000 year old cave paintings

2 Dennis Brutus was a Zimbabwean-born, South African poet who was imprisoned on Robben Island

**After the loss of a daughter and her two cousins**

There is no method

Only madness

For the man standing still

Long enough for the dove to alight

Comforted by his quietness

Pity the man clinging to loss

Walking daily with the memory

Of past possibility

Communing within this unholy trinity

The man for whom death is past

Too easily finds a place to which he longs to return

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